

APOTHEOSIS

Mike Etasi, provost of the Chthonic Organisation of Northerners (CON) strode briskly across the park, his crimson cassock's flowing ends rippling in the predawn breeze. The first streaks of sunlight would soon be piercing through the rustling leaves in the park and illuminating the dewy, lush grass to give the famous morning sparkle that tourists always adored about Sungura Park. The provost adjusted his cap, glanced either side taking in a quick view of his surroundings, and continued right ahead.

He was sixty one, but many claimed he looked way younger, probably forty something. He had a gait that portrayed an aura of importance, and yet, he was a quiet man, humble even for his magnanimous influence and very, very charismatic. His eyes, small balls of a pale white, sunk ever so deep in their sockets sometimes he was mistakenly thought to be sleeping through meetings. He had a sinewy frame, all of six feet, and he walked with long, assured strides.

He had been elected Provost of CON thirteen years ago, and the organisation's influence had grown exponentially with every passing year since. This past night, however, he had received a call that would paint a lasting legacy for him. He had been in his house sipping on his favorite concoction of lemon juice, crushed ginger, garlic and tamarind when his cell phone buzzed. It was a strange caller.

"Monsieur Etasi," a calm female voice sounded in the earpiece. "My name is Sophia. This is much classified information, and you are the best person I could relay this to. So listen and listen carefully."

Mr Etasi sat upright and squinted as he pushed the small gadget against his ear.

"Your organization, CON, almost lost its identity when they lost a priceless golden cube, embedded in a glass cuboid, to unknown people two decades ago. The golden cube is believed to contain a vial of mercury inside, and a vellum writing, which contains the highest of secrets for the organization. Is this true, Mr Etasi?"

Mr Etasi was shaking. How could a stranger know all this? Well, there was Google, and the search engine could help one unearth wisdom unparalleled, but why on earth would anyone want

to talk to the provost about a treasure the organization had lost so long ago and one they had given up on ever recovering?

“It is true, Sophia.”

The lady sighed enigmatically.

“In the wrong hands, it is believed the golden cube, or the glass cuboid, could ruin the reputation of CON and introduce damaging truths to the world if someone managed to open it, right?”

Uneasily, the provost agreed. The lady sighed again.

“Now I have some news for you. Don’t ask how this happened, but I have the glass cuboid, intact, and I would like to hand it back to you.”

“What?” Mr Etasi was trembling vigorously, and he almost dropped his phone. “How, Where is...”

“A minute. Check your whatsapp.”

The lady hang up.

The trembling fingers of the provost swiped across his phone’s screen until he had opened Whatsapp. Then, the phone pinged. There was a message from the strange number, and, still trembling, the provost opened it.

And jumped with shock. There, glinting scintillatingly in light, was the cuboid of CON, with the clearly visible cube of gold inside, all intact like they had been when they were stolen twenty years ago.

The secret is to die famous.

Sophia remembered all that she had been told when she was inducted into the family of Nasat. A secret society with doctrines many could only speculate about and point to with scorn, Nasat had set base in Nairobi, Kenya’s capital city, in the late 90s. Sophia, the daughter of one of the most powerful men in the engineering community, had slid into the group which demanded that

members donate millions of shillings annually to its accounts with the promise of mystical powers in the afterlife for every inductee that died famous in Natas.

“In life, you leave an eternal legacy. If you don’t, then you have one final chance to leap towards apotheosis: die a death that will be broadcast on national media. Die a *famous* death. Generate a debate. Fortify your status and let your name be inscribed on the wall of fame with indelible ink. Apotheosis.”

Sophia was approaching that level. She had lived an honourable life, but she had not managed any incredible feat in her life. Now she had figured out exactly how she was going to become an immortal, to gain godlike abilities in the afterlife.

Die famous.

As she caressed the glass cuboid, Sophia knew that her time had come. The whole world would be talking about her this same day, and all news bulletins would have her face.

Immortality.

Apotheosis.

She had already spurred the interest of several media houses, sending a flurry of emails to all the addresses she had collected and double-checked. She also emailed the police. She had also confirmed they had all been delivered.

ONE O’ CLOCK, AT THE BILLING TOWERS, I WILL PERSONALLY HAND IN THE LOST CON GLASS CUBOID TO THE PROVOST, BUT I HAVE MADE DEMANDS THAT HE MUST ADHERE TO, FAILURE TO WHICH THIS WILL BE A MESSY AFFAIR.

Not too wordy, but she knew that gripped their senses like nothing else could. Immediately, the media houses had written back demanding to know more about it and who she was, and she had smiled to herself victoriously as she sent them the words BE THERE and did not attempt to reply to them anymore.

The provost hurried into the CON Headquarters, saying a quick greeting to the guards who were shaking off the last vestiges of sleep. He raced down the mazy pathways that adorned the front yard, the flowers in full bloom washing the air around him with a splendid, welcome fragrance. Even in his panicked haste, he acknowledged the perfection nature cast around him.

He had barely inserted his key into place when a distinct whirring sound coming from inside struck his eardrums. *My office phone*. He hurriedly opened the door and ran straight across to receive the call.

“Mr Etasi, I hope you are well. This is The People’s TV. An anonymous person has just emailed us alerting us that there is some business you are to transact at Billing Towers a little past noon. The unidentified person promises dire consequences should you not cooperate. Has this information reached you?”

The provost juddered. Sophia had not told him of any demands or consequences. He told the caller so, and he could hear a gasp from the other end. The provost wondered why Sophia had called the media. He had hoped he would be the only person privy to Sophia’s information and had anticipated a private handover of the cuboid, already planning how he would delude the public into believing that he had worked tirelessly for the retrieval of the hallowed antique. It would be easy, he thought, to reach a deal with such a person who was this willing to reveal that she, indeed, had somehow recovered the priceless symbol of CON.

“Mr Etasi, don’t you think Sophia is a mere attention seeker?” the caller quipped.

“Actually,” the provost said softly, “she has sent me a picture of the cuboid. I am convinced beyond any doubts that she has it.”

The caller gasped, again, in disbelief.

When the conversation had ended, the provost promptly fished out his cell phone and called Sophia. He wanted to enquire why she had alerted the media about the cuboid, and exactly what demands she had claimed to have made to the provost. Sophia’s line was dead, though. The provost tried again and again, cursing every time four successive beeps sounded to alert him that the phone he was trying to reach was switched off.

The provost dialed 911 in haste. He waited with a bated breath as the phone started ringing.

Billing Towers is a magnificent skyscraper, a masterpiece that embodies the architectural aplomb of Nairobi. Rising a dizzying three hundred and eighty metres, the building is the epitome of beauty and has been listed among a hundred most splendid architectural buildings in the world five times by Geeks magazine. It was completed in 2003, and was, at the time, the tallest building in East Africa, its pointed tip seemingly piercing into the skies and the humongous French windows patterned to form what looked like spiral staircases ascending to its rooftop. The building houses a lot of businesses and is used by many as a most potent city landmark.

An old Toyota Corolla waltzed through the lazy afternoon traffic and stopped at Nation Centre. The provost paid the taxi driver and exited. He crossed the road quickly, his cassock billowing in the strong wind that brushed across. He adjusted his spectacles anxiously as he hurried towards Billing Towers. It was quarter to one.

He had barely gotten there when, suddenly, he saw people flush out cameras and blinding flashes struck his face. The media seemed to have sent undercover journalists. It was always busy at Billing House, but it seemed even busier this afternoon.

“Mr Etasi,” a female voice called. “Could you tell us what exactly the lost cuboid means to CON and why it is of such paramount importance to have it back?”

The provost stopped to answer the question as the lady rushed in front of him. Just then, he realized he had made a mistake. Tens of hands ganged up in his face, all holding wee voice recorders. Inscribed on the gadgets, he could see, were names of some of the most prominent media houses in the country.

“I am running out of time, and I would be glad if you let me go...”

“Look!” Someone shouted.

Everybody turned and followed a young man's gaze onto a first floor balcony where a middle aged woman had appeared, holding aloft a cuboid that had a golden glitter. She was smiling down at the multitude as she edged closer to the balcony's outer railing.

Sophia, the provost knew.

When she had had their attention and all the cameras had focused on her, Sophia, with an amplified voice, demanded that she addresses the provost. The provost stepped ahead, stared up and waited.

"You can see what I have in my hands," Sophia spoke, her voice drifting away in the wind but still commendably audible. The provost nodded, clearly seeing the cuboid Sophia delicately wrapped in her hands. "This is something that is bound to give you unprecedented power among the elites in CON, if you could have it with you. It is such a lovely piece of art, isn't it?" Sophia admired the glittering cuboid for a while. Cameras zoomed in.

"I know how much power this gives," she said, "and I have that power now. This is a matter of national interest because CON is an influential organization, and I am sorry, Mr Etasi, but we have conflicting interests." She paused, instinctively surveying the crowd now growing ever so tremendously. A feeling of pride swept over her.

"I really don't have any demands to make, Mr Etasi, and thus, you shouldn't be in the least concerned. I have alerted the police of this short meeting, though. Because the circus is about to be opened, and the show is about to begin, and it will be very short."

She reached beneath her flowing dress and pulled out a pistol. A few cowered. *The secret is how to die famous.*

"There are interests I have to serve, and this is the right arena. And, Mr Etasi, sadly, tonight, you are the bait, and probably the loser. Not much of a loser, but I assure you there is nothing you gain from this, but dashed hopes and extinguished dreams. And look around. The people around you immortalize me." There was a nonchalance in her voice that the provost did not like.

She raised her pistol discreetly then inched forward. Carefully, she set the glass cuboid on the railing, balanced it and stepped behind. Then she took dead aim.

“No!” the provost screamed.

Sophia smiled. This was getting easier than she had anticipated. She did not have to shoot the cuboid. She just needed to irk the police so they could shoot her.

And she succeeded.

Just as her pistol hovered over the glass cuboid, the provost weighed the possibility of recovering the cuboid. *She has to be shot before she can get a bullet through the glass.* Sophia stared down and realized that if the cuboid fell, it was going to shatter into an extended balcony that was unoccupied at the moment, and she knew exactly how she was going to irk them.

With a howl, Sophie pressed a delicate finger on the trigger. The hollow click of her gun was swallowed by the crushing roar of a gunshot as one of the officers shot her at the provost’s command. As Sophie collapsed in a heap, her pistol tumbled onto the cuboid and the shimmering box teetered atop the railing, then somersaulted to the balcony below. There, it exploded into tiny shards of glass.

The provost sank onto his knees in dejection. *They are watching, all over the country. They are watching me lose.*

When the golden cube was retrieved and the provost saw it, his heart sank. Sophia’s words came flying back into his brain. *Mr Etasi...not much of a loser, but I assure you there is nothing you gain from this, but dashed hopes and extinguished dream.* The cube was a normal wooden box, wrapped in a golden paper, and there was nothing else inside it. Mr Etasi admitted that the person behind the antics must have been an extremely creative mind.

When the provost, the media and the police got to Sophia’s lifeless body, they realized that the pistol on her was fake. They also noticed an array of identical tattoos all over her body, the word *Natas*. There and then, the provost got it. *I have been used as bait. I have given her immortality. I have elevated her to a godlike status. Apotheosis.*

As the media houses mulled over occurrences of the afternoon and broadcast the occurrences at Billing Towers, Sophia’s name was written with indelible ink on Natas’ wall of fame.

